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The situation in the Middle East

Question of Palestine

Security Council
Seventieth year

Peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is submitted in accordance with General Assembly resolution 69/23. It contains replies received from the parties concerned to the notes verbales sent by the Secretary-General pursuant to the request contained in paragraph 24 of the resolution. The report also contains the observations of the Secretary-General on the current state of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and on international efforts to move the peace process forward with a view to achieving a peaceful settlement. The report covers the period from September 2014 through August 2015.

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I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 69/23.

2. On 1 July 2015, pursuant to the request contained in paragraph 24 of the above-mentioned resolution, I addressed the following letter to the President of the Security Council:

> "I have the honour to refer to resolution 69/23, which the General Assembly adopted on 25 November 2014, at its sixty-ninth session, under the agenda item 'Question of Palestine'.
>
> "Paragraph 24 of the resolution requests the Secretary-General to continue his efforts with the parties concerned, and in consultation with the Security Council, towards the attainment of a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine and the promotion of peace in the region and to submit to the General Assembly at its seventieth session a report on these efforts and on developments on this matter.
>
> "In order to fulfil my reporting responsibilities under this resolution, I should be grateful if you would kindly convey to me the views of the Security Council by 31 July 2015.
>
> "Recalling the Secretariat's obligation to observe the page limit of its reports, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 52/214, I would like to encourage the Security Council to limit its submission to 1,500 words."

3. As at 1 September, no response had been received to that request.

4. In a note verbale dated 14 May 2015 to the parties concerned, I sought the positions of the Governments of Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as the State of Palestine, regarding any steps taken by them to implement the relevant provisions of the resolution. As at 31 August 2015, replies had been received from Israel and the State of Palestine.

5. The note verbale dated 27 July 2015 from the Permanent Observer Mission of the State of Palestine to the United Nations reads as follows:

> "The resolution 'Peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine' constitutes a longstanding contribution by the General Assembly towards justly, comprehensively and peacefully resolving the question of Palestine based on international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions. The resolution continues to receive overwhelming support, reaffirming the global consensus calling for Israel's complete withdrawal from the Palestinian territory occupied since June 1967, including East Jerusalem; achievement of the two-State solution of an independent, sovereign, contiguous State of Palestine, living side by side with Israel in peace and security within recognized borders based on the pre-1967 borders; and a just solution for the Palestine refugees based on resolution 194 (III).
>
> "This consensus reflects the long-held position of the Palestinian people and leadership, since formal acceptance of the two-State solution in the 1988 Declaration of Independence of the State of Palestine. This significant compromise to establish the State of Palestine on only 22 per cent of our

historic homeland for the sake of restoring our rights, achieving our self-determination and freedom and ending the conflict is among the boldest confirmations of Palestine's commitment to peace. Remarkably, this commitment has prevailed, despite the historic injustice inflicted on the Palestinian people since the adoption of partition resolution 181 (II) in 1947 and the tragedy of Al-Nakba of 1948, from which our people continue to suffer to this day, particularly the Palestine refugees.

"Here, we underscore the gravity of the plight of the Palestine refugees, who constitute the largest, most protracted refugee problem in the world (5.3 million people) and are enduring immense hardships, which intensified this past year, despite the humanitarian assistance and protection continuously provided to them by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) since it began operations 65 years ago. This is due to the impact of Israel's illegal practices in Occupied Palestine, including, inter alia, the military aggressions and humanitarian crisis inflicted on the Gaza Strip, the latest in July-August 2014; the inhumane blockade of Gaza since 2007; and settlement activities and forced displacement of Palestinians, including refugees and particularly Bedouins, in the West Bank. The refugees' situation has also degenerated due to regional instability, foremost the Syrian conflict, which has inflicted death, destruction and displacement on Palestine refugees, along with Syrian civilians suffering so gravely, and also affected Palestine refugee communities in Lebanon and Jordan, where many refugees have fled. It has also been affected by UNRWA's unprecedented financial shortfalls, which if unmet threaten the Agency's vital services, including schooling for 500,000 children, and its stabilizing role at this precarious time.

"The urgency of achieving a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine, the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict, in all aspects and of intensifying efforts towards that end is reaffirmed from the outset of the operational paragraphs of resolution 69/23. As reflected in the support for resolution 69/23, the grave impact of this conflict and unsustainability of the situation and, inversely, the manifold benefits peace would bring for the Palestinian and Israeli peoples, the Middle East region and the international community as a whole are facts widely recognized and propelling the collective calls and efforts for peace. However, 2014-2015 witnessed a deepening of the political impasse with a breakdown of American-led peace talks in April 2014 due to Israel's suspension of negotiations, followed by its criminal war against Gaza, exacerbating the fragile situation and casting further doubt on its intentions and commitment to peace and the two-State solution.

"The year also witnessed continued failure of the international community, particularly the Security Council, to uphold its obligations to redress the crisis, salvage the two-State solution and contribute to attainment of peace. This was most notably reflected in the failure of the Security Council to adopt the draft resolution (S/2014/916) presented for a vote on 30 December 2014 by Jordan, which called, inter alia, for achievement of a peaceful solution that brings an end to the Israeli occupation since 1967 and fulfils the vision of two States within a timeframe of no later than 12 months from the resolution's adoption. As of this note's writing, the Council has failed to heed

the calls to uphold its responsibilities vis-à-vis the search for a peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and efforts in this regard continue to be obstructed or delayed, including the initiative led by France to reaffirm the parameters for peace, based on the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative, and establish a timeframe to end the Israeli occupation as well as international monitoring and support for implementation of a peace agreement.

"Nevertheless, we continue calling on the Council to uphold its Charter mandate and adopt a resolution aimed at breaking the political impasse and accelerating realization of peace and security and continue cooperating with all efforts for this objective. The provisions of resolution 69/23 are fully respected by the Palestinian Government, which actively strives to implement the resolution and the other relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions in its actions, bilaterally, multilaterally or internally. This is pursued despite the enormous challenges arising from Israel's 48-year military occupation. We also recognize the necessity of Palestinian unity in this regard and continue efforts to achieve reconciliation and empower the national consensus Government to fulfil its duties, despite the cynical Israeli attempts to thwart unity and entrench the divide.

"Indeed, the State of Palestine has always respected its legal obligations and commitments in accordance with United Nations resolutions. We maintain that respect of the law is the key to resolving the conflict and this has been clearly reaffirmed by Palestine's recent accessions to the core international humanitarian law and human rights law treaties without reservations, as well as to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), and its exercise of its rights as well as upholding of obligations in this regard. These accessions — broadly welcomed by the international community — also underscore Palestine's intention to use all peaceful, political, legal and non-violent tools to achieve the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including the right to self-determination.

"Only international law can ensure that negotiations to resolve the final status issues — Jerusalem, Palestine refugees, settlements, borders, security, prisoners and water — actually result in a just, sustainable peace. The passage of decades has certified that neither justice nor peace can be achieved by military might and illegal actions and that a people can never be coerced to forgo their rights, regardless of the suffering and indignities forced upon them. Unfortunately, however, the impunity that Israel, the occupying Power, has for too long been permitted, never being held accountable for its violations and war crimes, is prolonging the conflict, undermining peace efforts and obstructing achievement of a peaceful settlement to the detriment of our people, the Middle East region and the global community.

"In the past year, Israel has persisted with its illegal policies and practices, provocations and incitement, which it never ceased from the onset of the occupation nearly a half century ago through all stages of the peace process — from the 1991 Madrid Peace Conference to the last incarnation of negotiations held under the auspices of United States Secretary of State John Kerry with the support of the other Quartet members of the European Union, the Russian Federation and the United Nations, the League of Arab States

Ministerial Committee, and concerned States from around the world — and thereafter.

"Israel's violations include, inter alia, continuation of its illegal settlement campaign in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, involving land confiscation, construction of settlements, the annexation wall, Israeli-only by-pass roads and other related infrastructure and the transfer of more Israeli settlers, as well as its military campaign against the Palestinian people, including the 2014 war on Gaza and daily military raids in the West Bank, causing death and injury to Palestinian civilians; destruction of Palestinian homes and property; forced displacement of Palestinians, particularly Bedouin families; exploitation of natural resources, including water; daily arrest raids, resulting in imprisonment and administrative detention of over 6,000 Palestinians, who are enduring inhumane conditions, abuse and torture at the hands of the occupier; policies aiding and abetting settler terror and violence against Palestinian civilians and destruction of property, including agricultural lands and Muslim and Christian holy sites; the illegal blockade of the Gaza Strip in collective punishment of the 1.8 million Palestinians there and strangulation of the economy and innumerable other measures of collective punishment against the Palestinian people, all in breach of international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention, relevant United Nations resolutions and the 2004 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, and in violation of provisions of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

"In this regard, we must recall the grave impact of the Israeli military aggression against the Gaza Strip, where the occupying forces slaughtered and injured thousands of Palestinian children, women and men, caused wanton destruction, and terrorized and traumatized the entire population. The disastrous impact of this Israeli onslaught on the defenseless Palestinian civilian population in Gaza has been corroborated by several United Nations reports, including of the Human Rights Council's Commission of Inquiry and the Secretary-General's Board of Inquiry and in the Secretary-General's report on children and armed conflict, in which Israel was wrongly omitted from the list of grave violators of children's rights. In fact, the Commission of Inquiry found that Israel persisted with its onslaught even after early knowledge of the high casualty figures, indicating a deliberate decision on the part of Israeli officials to inflict such harm, a fact also confirmed by the testimonies of Israeli soldiers, who were instructed to kill anyone they encountered in Gaza.

"By the time of the 26 August 2014 ceasefire, the Israeli occupying forces had killed 2,251 Palestinians, the majority civilians, including 551 children and 299 women, and injured over 11,000 Palestinians, including 3,540 women and 3,436 children, with injuries so severe due to the lethal weaponry and wide-impact explosives used that 10 per cent of the injured will suffer life-long disabilities. A total of 142 families suffered the killing of three or more family members in Israeli attacks and 89 entire families were killed. Eleven UNRWA staff were also killed, along with twenty-three health workers. Civilian casualties continue to be caused by thousands of unexploded Israeli ordnance remaining in Gaza.

"The physical destruction caused by the Israeli occupying forces included destruction and severe damage caused to thousands of homes, schools, businesses, hospitals, United Nations facilities, and civilian infrastructure. At the conflict's height, over 500,000 people were displaced, the majority sheltering in 90 UNRWA schools, where they sought protection under the United Nations flag, yet where 42 people were killed, including 16 children, in Israeli strikes on the schools. In total, 12,620 homes were totally destroyed by the occupying forces, 6,455 were severely damaged beyond habitation and over 80,000 were damaged. A year later, not a single destroyed home has been rebuilt due to Israel's blockade and restrictions, with less than 1 per cent of needed construction materials entering Gaza and donor funding for reconstruction insufficient despite generous pledges made at the Cairo Conference. Over 110,000 people remain homeless, the majority Palestine refugees, forced to shelter with host families, in temporary housing or in the ruins of their homes.

"More than 100 United Nations facilities were damaged, 75 hospitals and clinics were damaged and 543 schools were damaged or destroyed, the highest recorded number in the world in 2014. Gaza's sole power plant was targeted by Israeli strikes, causing persisting blackouts of 12 to 16 hours a day. Sixty-three water facilities were damaged and twenty-three were destroyed, worsening the water crisis in an area where 90 per cent of water is unfit for human consumption. In total, 33,000 meters of water and waste networks and 27 per cent of pumping stations were damaged. In addition, 500 economic and industrial facilities, constituting 60 per cent of Gaza's production capacity, were destroyed, affecting more than 35,000 jobs, deepening poverty, in addition to livelihoods lost due to the blockade and 2008-2009 Israeli aggression. Unemployment in Gaza now stands above 43 per cent, with youth unemployment at an alarming 60 per cent. Food insecurity is rampant, with 80 per cent of the population aid-dependent.

"Compounding the human insecurity and despair caused by this Israeli aggression is the humanitarian crisis arising from Israel's illegal eight-year blockade of Gaza. This humanitarian crisis has negatively impacted every single aspect of life, with short- and long-term socioeconomic implications that are depriving and disfiguring Palestinian society. As recognized globally, this unjust situation is unsustainable and volatile, requiring immediate remedy to avert further deterioration and explosion of another cycle of violence.

"One year on, the human and physical wounds remain unhealed in Gaza and hopes are fading for any relief from this appalling injustice and restoration of the rights and dignity of our people. This deplorable situation, coupled with relentless Israeli settlement activities throughout the rest of Occupied Palestine, repression of Palestinian civilians and incitement by Israeli government, military and religious leaders and extremist settlers, particularly regarding Occupied East Jerusalem and the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, has severely aggravated conditions on the ground, entrenched the political impasse and pushed farther away from our goal of peace. Clearly, the moment that Israel laun its 2014 offensive, and considering the illegal actions perpetrated since and the declarations by Israeli leaders — including the provocative, anti-two-State remarks by the Prime Minister during the 2015 elections — it aimed to destroy the prospects for peace, intensify its

oppression of the Palestinian people and strip them of hope for an end to this cruel occupation and realization of their inalienable rights.

"It is not coincidental that the Israeli aggression was launched against a backdrop of heightened pressure on Israel in the peace process; international acceptance of the Palestinian national consensus Government; unanimous condemnation of settlement activities and the Gaza blockade; and rising calls for boycott, divestment and sanctions against Israel. It is an obvious repeat of past crises created by Israel to divert attention and evade efforts to advance a peaceful solution to the conflict, by only paying lip-service to peace while it actively sabotages the two-State solution with total disrespect for international law and contempt for the international community.

"That is why — despite the global calls for a just solution based on two States on the pre-1967 borders, the historic compromise made by the Palestinian leadership over a quarter century ago, over two decades of negotiations and the passage of more than 48 years since the adoption of resolution 242 (1967) — the political impasse continues and peace remains elusive. This is why resolution 69/23 remains unimplemented. It is the direct outcome of Israel's illegal, combative behavior by which it continues to deny Palestinian rights and perpetuate its illegal occupation and of its rejection of peace, bad faith and obstruction of all attempts to revive negotiations based on clear parameters rooted in the Security Council's resolutions.

"Aiming to prevent further destabilization, stem the human suffering and salvage the prospects for peace, Palestine has repeatedly drawn international attention to this grave situation and called for action in line with international law, the relevant United Nations resolutions and the permanent responsibility towards the question of Palestine until it is resolved justly in all aspects. The Palestinian leadership remains insistent that a just peace is the only remedy for the conflict and the violence, deprivation and instability it engenders, and firmly rejects the claims that "now is not the right time" for a solution. That time is actually long overdue. As we witness the instability in Palestine and throughout the region, we do not have the luxury to continue delaying peace. Moreover, the Palestinian people can no longer delay realization of their human rights, nor accept rationales asking them to endure more violations, suffering and indignities, while the occupying Power is placated and appeased, not even being held accountable for its most egregious crimes.

"Regrettably, our appeals and efforts have been to no avail and the Security Council remains paralyzed and the international community unable to effectively confront Israeli impunity. This makes it more imperative for the General Assembly to act boldly to address this tragic conflict, which has been on the agenda of the Organization since its inception, yet shamefully remains unresolved. Here, in conjunction with the relevant United Nations resolutions, we stress the importance of the Arab Peace Initiative and its promise for opening doors to a new era of peace, stability, cooperation and collective action for our common goals and problems. The international community must call on Israel to reciprocate this historic initiative.

"Palestine seeks peace and coexistence with Israel, but this must be based on freedom and justice. This requires a complete end to the Israeli occupation and the colonial, racist policies that have fueled it for five decades.

Respect for international law and human rights, not military might and violence, must be the core of this peace. Interim solutions or other palliatives to 'ease' or manage the situation will not suffice. The root causes and underlying issues of the conflict must be addressed in accordance with international law.

"The plight of the Palestinian people — from Occupied Palestine to our refugee camps in the region, especially in Syria — is an existential crisis urgently demanding a just solution. We appeal to the General Assembly to uphold the legal, political and moral responsibilities in this regard and likewise extend this appeal to the entire United Nations system and Member States to uphold their responsibilities. We also recall relevant declarations by the Conference of High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention, most recently on 17 December 2014, and the obligations in this regard.

"The Security Council in specific is duty-bound to address this conflict, which continues to threaten international peace and security, and must act towards bringing a definitive end to the occupation and conflict and establishing a just and lasting peace. Pending that achievement, action must be taken to ensure protection to the Palestinian people under Israel's occupation, an obligation that the occupying Power has abdicated as it willfully and wantonly causes harm to the population and is the direct source of their insecurity, suffering and vulnerability.

"The foundations for peace must be firmly set before this opportunity is lost to us and the two-State solution is relegated to the archives of history. The political will must be found to compel Israel to cease all of its illegal policies and measures in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and comply with its legal obligations. Moreover, there must be accountability for Israeli crimes against the Palestinian people. Peace and accountability are not mutually exclusive: both can and must be pursued, for impunity will always obstruct peace and peace cannot exist without justice.

"We also underscore the universal view that failure to achieve a just solution to the conflict and continued denial of Palestinian rights, including Palestine's rightful place among the community of nations, have severely undermined international law and the international system, including the credibility of the Security Council and the United Nations as a whole. However, despite the failures and setbacks, the Palestinian people still look to the United Nations, with the democratic General Assembly at the forefront, to act with conscience to establish peace and fulfill the covenant made over 67 years ago to the Palestinian people in regard to their inalienable rights, foremost to self-determination. On its part, the Palestinian Government remains ready to make peace, based on the longstanding parameters, and will continue cooperating with all international efforts, based on its conviction in the rule of law and resolve to achieve a just solution that will achieve the independence of the State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including the Palestine refugees, and achieve Palestinian-Israeli peace, security and coexistence.

"We are at a crossroads that will determine whether the solution of two States living side by side in peace and security on the basis of the pre-1967 borders will become reality or meet its demise. For genuine progress to be

made, the crisis on the ground and root causes of this conflict must be seriously redressed. Respect for resolution 69/23 and all relevant resolutions would certainly enhance peace prospects. If, however, Israel remains intransigent, peace efforts will continue failing and we will have to face the end of the two-State solution and the onset of new collective efforts — political, legal and popular — for alternative solutions to end the injustice and realize the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

"We express appreciation for the tireless efforts of the Secretary-General and the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and the United Nations system as a whole in support of a peaceful solution and of Palestinian humanitarian and developmental needs. We also recognize the important role of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People in raising international awareness and support for Palestinian rights and a just solution. We also reiterate gratitude for the principled support of all concerned States and civil society worldwide, and urge that no effort be spared to achieve long-overdue freedom, justice and dignity for the Palestinian people and lasting peace and security for our region."

6. The note verbale dated 13 August 2015 from the Permanent Mission of Israel to the United Nations reads as follows:

"As shown in the meeting records, Israel voted against this resolution, as it has done on similar resolutions adopted in the past by the General Assembly. Resolution 69/23 joins the numerous one-sided resolutions passed annually, and automatically, by the General Assembly which only serve to undermine the credibility of the United Nations as an impartial agent for the advancement of peace.

"The State of Israel continuously strives to attain a peaceful settlement of the conflict with the Palestinians and to promote peace in the region. Time and time again Israel has demonstrated to the international community its commitment to finding a long-lasting solution to the conflict. Resolution 69/23 overlooks the steps Israel has taken, and continues to take, to end the conflict.

"At the same time, resolution 69/23 fails to examine the situation objectively, disregarding the role played by the Palestinians in making it more difficult to attain a peaceful resolution to the conflict, in particular the role of Hamas.

"In August 2005, Israel dismantled its settlements and military presence and disengaged from the Gaza Strip. Rather than using this opportunity for development, Hamas took advantage of Israel's absence to launch terror attacks from Gaza against Israeli citizens. Terror activities escalated further after Hamas took control of the Gaza Strip in 2006. Despite Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip in 2005, Hamas has continued to target Israeli civilians with thousands of rockets. Hamas' unprovoked attacks are not the consequence of efforts to seek redress of legitimate grievances, as some claim. Rather they are a consequence of Hamas' guiding ideology.

"Hamas is a virulently anti-Semitic organization, whose very charter calls on Muslims to kill Jews. Hamas is not dedicated to improving the plight

of the people of Gaza. Instead, its goal is nothing less than the destruction of Israel, no matter the cost to the Palestinian population.

"Last summer, the State of Israel faced constant attack as Hamas launched more than 4,500 rockets at civilian populations in Israeli towns and communities. Israel's south has been the target of bombardment for 15 years, its children constantly subject to indiscriminate attacks from Gaza. Operation 'Protective Edge' was launched as a last resort to reinstate safety and security to its citizens, litres following the abduction and murder by Hamas of three Israeli teenagers and the barrage of rockets targeting the Israeli population that followed.

"During the operation, Israel kept the crossing into Gaza open despite the constant rocket attacks, including those targeting the crossings themselves. Over the course of those days (8 July-27 August) 5,779 trucks of goods, 4.58 million litres of diesel fuel for the Gaza power station, 1.73 million litres of diesel fuel for UNRWA, 9.8 million litres of diesel fuel and 4.26 million litres of gasoline for transportation needs entered Gaza from Israel. Throughout the entire conflict, the Erez crossing remained open for medical purposes.

"Despite the relentless and acute threats to its security, Israel is actively working to support reconstruction efforts in the Gaza Strip. Israel has intensified its cooperation with the international community and with the Palestinian Authority to facilitate sustainable infrastructural and economic development in Gaza, in order to meet both the short-term and long-term needs of the civilian population.

"The following are a few of the extensive measures undertaken by Israel to facilitate reconstruction in Gaza.

"The border crossings between Israel and Gaza have been upgraded to allow up to 800 truckloads of building materials and other goods to enter the Gaza Strip on a daily basis. Every single day, approximately 550 truckloads of goods, carrying everything from foodstuffs to vehicles, pass into Gaza from Israel. Israel has also allocated approximately $10 million to further expand the capacity of the crossings to over 1,000 trucks a day.

"It is important to note that for the past five years, all types of foodstuffs, as well as all consumer and other goods, have been allowed to enter Gaza from Israel. The only prohibited items are weapons and a short list of dual-use items that can be exploited for use in terrorism.

"Israel has facilitated the passage of over 1.2 million tons of materials into Gaza since the end of last summer's conflict with Hamas. Of these materials, over 260,000 tons were sent for the reconstruction mechanism, over 281,000 tons for international community projects and nearly 650,000 tons for reconstructing roads.

"Israel is facilitating construction projects in Gaza, including housing (sometimes the construction of entire neighborhoods) as well as schools, clinics and infrastructure projects. Such projects may be initiated and funded by international organizations, foreign States, the Palestinian Authority, or private entities. Recent progress in these projects includes laying the

cornerstone for the third stage of a neighborhood in Rafah with 220 housing units, as well as for the al-Zafer Tower project in Gaza City.

"There are currently 367 ongoing construction projects initiated by international organizations, in various stages of implementation. As of June 17, approximately 63 per cent of the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism (GRM) projects have been completed or are in the implementation stage (with work being carried out or approved yet awaiting the start of work). Ninety-four per cent of the international projects outside GRM have been completed or are in the implementation stage.

"More than 14,000 people enter Israel from the Gaza Strip every single month. This monthly figure includes many thousands of Gazan businessmen, pilgrims to the Muslim holy sites in Jerusalem, medical care patients and their escorts on their way to receive urgent medical treatment in Israel and non-urgent medical treatment in the West Bank, and many more.

"Israel has doubled the number of entry permits from Gaza for members of the business sector.

"Israel has also facilitated the entry of reconstruction personnel into Gaza, issuing more than 1,000 permits since summer 2014 for travel from the West Bank. Likewise, Israel has also facilitated the entry of engineers and other relevant professionals into Gaza for international community projects.

"Above and beyond the reconstruction efforts, Israel has also undertaken measures to strengthen the economy of Gaza and improve the lives of its residents.

"Since October 2014, Israel has facilitated the export of nearly 6 million tons of industrial goods (mainly textiles and furniture) and agricultural produce (including fish) from Gaza, via Israel, and marketed to the West Bank, to Israel and abroad.

"Israel has doubled the amount of water it supplies to Gaza from 5 million to 10 million cubic meters of water annually (2.6 billion United States gallons). This is in addition to the 125 MW of electricity that Israel supplies to the Gaza Strip.

"Other economy boosting measures include: setting the fishing zone off Gaza's coastline for Palestinian boats at 10 km (6 miles); the establishment of a Coca-Cola factory, with the requested equipment, in the Karni Industrial Estate; and the import of engines and second-hand vehicles into the Gaza Strip.

"Israel has undertaken these measures, and many more, despite the major security risks they pose. In the past, Hamas (an internationally recognized terror organization) has diverted massive amounts of aid and imported goods for use in its terrorist infrastructure. For instance, building materials worth tens of millions of dollars were diverted by Hamas for the construction of their cross-border tunnels, which were used to attack Israel during the summer 2014 conflict. Hamas continues to pursue its efforts to rearm, expand its rocket arsenal and construct the infrastructure it plans to use in its next attack on Israel.

"Despite Israel's best efforts, some reconstruction is being hindered by forces beyond its control. Delays in reconstruction predominantly stem from the actions of Hamas, which controls Gaza, and the conflict between this terrorist organization and the Palestinian Authority. For example, Hamas refuses to allow the Palestinian Authority to take security and civilian responsibility for the Palestinian side of Gaza's border crossings with Israel and Egypt. Furthermore, Hamas continues to misappropriate construction materials for use in terrorist infrastructures. For its part, the Palestinian Authority wants to weaken the Hamas regime and this goal appears to be influencing the pace and extent of its reconstruction activities.

"The Palestinian Authority is not only obstructing the reconstruction of the physical infrastructure in Gaza, it has failed to construct a credible political infrastructure. The path to a peaceful settlement requires good governance and leadership responsive to the will of the people. Yet, the president of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas, is in his eleventh year of a five-year term.

"The aforementioned steps taken by the State of Israel attest to its commitment to a peaceful resolution to the conflict. However, this commitment has not been reciprocated. On the one hand, Hamas has, time and time again, chosen to invest in terror, not peace. On the other hand, the Palestinian Authority is avoiding its responsibility for the people it claims to represent, and fails to lay the foundations for good governance.

"The State of Israel reiterates its willingness for an agreement in accord with the principles of the two-State solution and acknowledges the important role played by the Quartet in this matter. Israel calls on the Palestinian Authority to reaffirm its adherence to the achievement of a permanent and comprehensive resolution of the conflict, by engaging in confidence building measures and bilateral agreements in lieu of unilateral declarative actions in various multinational forums."

II. Observations

7. International efforts to promote the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine focused on the possibility of creating a framework for the parties' return to meaningful negotiations. Apart from a meeting between the Israeli and Palestinian chief negotiators in Amman in late July 2015, there were no direct peace process-related talks between the two leaderships.

8. During most of the reporting period, which immediately followed the devastating war in Gaza, the situation on the ground was characterized by relatively low levels of violence, a gradual easing of movement restrictions and a slowdown in settlement activity in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. However, there were periods of heightened tension and violence in October and November 2014 and July 2015. The situation in Gaza remained volatile, owing mainly to worsening socioeconomic conditions, delays in reconstruction, deterioration in internal security, continued movement restrictions and the deepening political divide between the Palestinian authorities in Gaza and the West Bank.

9. On 30 December, a draft Security Council resolution seeking to reach a final status agreement and an end to the occupation by the end of 2017 failed to pass.

10. The following day, President Abbas signed instruments of accession to 18 international treaties, including the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. On 2 January, I accepted the submission of 16 instruments of accession after having ascertained that the instruments received were in due and proper form.

11. On 3 January, in retaliation, Israel, contrary to its obligations under the Paris Protocol of the Oslo Accords, commenced the withholding of tax revenues collected on behalf of the Palestinian Authority for the month of December. An agreement was reached on 27 March between the Palestinian Authority and the Government of Israel under which Israel transferred more than $470 million in withheld revenues.

12. On 17 March, general elections were held in Israel. I was deeply concerned by many of the hard-line statements made in the final days of campaigning. I urged the incoming Government of Israel to act on Prime Minister Netanyahu's reaffirmations, after his re-election, of his commitment to the two-State solution. The Middle East Quartet met at the principals level on 8 February in Munich. The Quartet prioritized the urgent resumption of negotiations and a strengthening of its engagement to prepare for a revival of the peace process, including through regular and direct outreach to the Arab States and the promotion of the Arab Peace Initiative. It also called for the acceleration of reconstruction in Gaza. In July, Quartet envoys, as part of an active outreach effort, engaged constructively with Egypt, Jordan and the League of Arab States.

13. Last summer's conflict in Gaza — the firing of rockets from Gaza into Israel and the subsequent Israel Defence Forces' so-called "Operation Protective Edge" — led to levels of death and destruction unprecedented in this conflict. I deeply regret the loss of civilian life during the escalation. The intensity and destructiveness of the conflict substantially exacerbated the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza, including the observed deterioration of food security, physical and mental health, access to basic services and economic livelihoods.

14. In the aftermath of the hostilities, efforts were made to strengthen the ceasefire brokered by Egypt on 26 August 2014. Addressing dire conditions of the civilian population in the Gaza Strip remained my priority during the reporting period. To facilitate reconstruction efforts, the United Nations brokered an agreement between Israel and the Palestinian Government of national consensus establishing procedures to enable "dual-use" materials to enter Gaza and their use to be monitored. The Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism was designed as a temporary measure to enable the entry of critical construction materials at scale and for a wide range of stakeholders in the immediate post-conflict period. The ultimate objective of the United Nations in Gaza continues to be the lifting of all closures within the framework of Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) and in a manner which relieves the suffering of the people of Gaza and addresses the legitimate security concerns of Israel.

15. I travelled to Cairo on 12 October for the International Conference on Palestine: Reconstructing Gaza, hosted by Egypt and supported by Norway. The event garnered $5.4 billion in pledges from some 50 countries, with $3.5 billion intended to support Gaza. As at 14 April, the World Bank reported that only 27.5 per cent of those pledges had been disbursed. I again urge donors to fulfil the pledges

they made in Cairo last October. From the outset of the conflict in Gaza, I called on all combatants to respect the sanctity of United Nations premises. However, a number of incidents occurred during the hostilities in which United Nations personnel, premises and operations were affected. In response, I established an internal board of inquiry to review and investigate 10 of those incidents. On 27 April, I released a comprehensive summary of the Board's report. The Board found that the seven incidents in which United Nations premises were hit were attributable to Israel.

16. The Board also reviewed three incidents involving weapons found in UNRWA schools. In two instances, the Board found that Palestinian armed groups might have used UNRWA school premises to launch attacks. The Board also made a number of recommendations, including on ways of further improving coordination between the United Nations and the Government of Israel to better ensure the safety and security of United Nations personnel and premises. I am actively pursuing these recommendations.

17. I fully supported the United Nations Independent Commission of Inquiry on the 2014 Gaza Conflict, led by Justice Mary McGowan Davis, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution S-21/1, and its broad investigation into all alleged human rights and international humanitarian law violations that took place before, during and after the military operations in Gaza between 13 June and 26 August 2014. It is my hope that the report of the Commission will pave the way for justice for all of the victims of last year's fighting.

18. Alarmingly, unemployment in Gaza reached 43 per cent at the end of 2014. The conditions in an already devastated Gaza will only worsen, and the risks of violence and radicalization increase, if the underlying causes of previous conflicts are not soon addressed.

19. The security implications of the persistent pressures on Gazan society continue to be felt. Worryingly, reports are increasing of extremist elements seeking to gain a greater foothold in Gaza in an attempt to ride on the local wave of discontent.

20. Under the leadership of President Abbas, the Palestinian Government of national consensus — which is fully committed to the principles of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) — must be empowered and enabled to assume its rightful responsibilities in Gaza, including in particular at the crossings with Israel and Egypt. Palestinian unity and civil service integration must be addressed as a priority. The United Nations stands ready to support the President and the Government of Palestine and all factions in their efforts to reunite the West Bank and Gaza, in line with the intra-Palestinian unity agreement of 23 April 2014.

21. I also welcomed Egypt's decision — following consultations with President Abbas — to open the Rafah crossing for an extended period in June. A regular and predictable schedule for the opening of Rafah is needed for the movement of people, especially for humanitarian cases, as the security situation allows.

22. Since the establishment of the temporary Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism, approximately 90,000 households in Gaza have accessed construction material for partially damaged housing. In this regard, on 22 June, the Palestinian Ministry of Public Works and Housing launched the "Residential Stream", which is intended to provide simplified access to construction material for the rebuilding of the approximately 18,000 completely or severely destroyed homes, as well as for the

construction of completely new housing to help offset the pre-war housing deficit of approximately 70,000 units. Some 1,700 beneficiaries have already been cleared and around 600 have purchased the required construction materials. These are positive steps on the long road to meeting Gaza's reconstruction needs. I would like to acknowledge and encourage a continuation of Israel's constructive cooperation with the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism.

23. There have been a number of other significant achievements since the end of hostilities in August 2014. Notably, the last internally displaced persons left the United Nations collective centres in Gaza on 17 June 2015. Nevertheless, the overall reconstruction of Gaza remains slow, with considerable financing gaps. On 12 February, the United Nations, in partnership with the Government of Palestine, launched the Strategic Response Plan for 2015, which aims to address the humanitarian needs of 1.6 million Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank. The Plan requests $705 million, 75 per cent of which is for Gaza.

24. The reporting period witnessed one attempt to break the Gaza maritime blockade. The Israeli navy intercepted the *Marianne*, a vessel which was part of the "Gaza Freedom Flotilla", on 29 June in international waters. I reiterate my calls on the Government of Israel to lift all closures, with due consideration of Israel's legitimate security concerns.

25. The Government of Israel has taken several positive steps in that direction, including lifting the eight-year ban on exports from Gaza to Israel and the West Bank, increasing quotas and expanding criteria for the exit of Palestinians from Gaza through the Erez crossing and increasing the capacity of the Kerem Shalom crossing. As a result, we have seen a significant rise in the number of people and goods passing through the crossings. I encourage the Government of Israel to pursue this policy further.

26. I remain worried about the state of human rights and freedoms in Gaza. Of particular concern are the reports of arbitrary detention being carried out by Palestinian security forces and the reports of ill-treatment in detention centres in Gaza. I call on the de facto authorities in Gaza to refrain from carrying out further executions. I also urge the Palestinian Authority to fulfil its responsibilities, with full respect for international human rights laws.

27. In July, the Government of Israel revealed that two of its citizens had entered the Gaza Strip independently, in two separate incidents, since September 2014. I reiterate my call to all relevant Palestinian actors in Gaza to provide information as to the possible whereabouts and conditions of the missing Israelis and to take prompt action to facilitate their safe return to their families.

28. On 30 July, the Palestinian Authority announced a partial reshuffle of the current Government, appointing five new ministers. Hamas rejected the reshuffle, arguing that it was not in line with previous agreements.

29. Violence in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, continued. The causes included Israeli security operations, violence by Jewish extremists, protests and attacks against Israelis by Palestinians and religious tensions associated with the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount. The Israel Defense Forces conducted 4,236 search and arrest operations, resulting in 5,638 Palestinians being arrested. In the Occupied Palestinian Territory, a total of 27 Palestinian civilians were killed and 2,755 Palestinians injured. Seven Israeli civilians and one of the Israel Defense

Forces personnel were killed and 112 Israeli civilians and 60 Israeli security forces personnel were injured. The Palestinian Authority continued arrests of suspected Hamas affiliates in the West Bank.

30. Shortly after the beginning of the reporting period, the Government of Israel appeared to put on hold settlement planning and tendering in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. The so-called planning freeze was violated in July by the Government's decision to advance construction and "legalization" of hundreds of units. Settlement activity in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, is illegal under international law.

31. Settler violence has decreased since 2014. As the result of attacks by settlers 2 Palestinians were killed and 86 Palestinians, including 22 children, were injured during the reporting period. Four Israeli settlers were killed and 96 Israeli settlers were injured by Palestinians. The most egregious example of settler violence during the reporting period took place on 31 July, when Ali Dawabsha, a Palestinian toddler, was murdered and the members of his family severely injured during an attack on their home in the West Bank. Ali's father, Sa'ad Dawabsha, died from his wounds on 8 August. I condemned this despicable act of terror, as did the Security Council and the leadership of Israel. The incident led to violent demonstrations, resulting in clashes between Palestinians in the West Bank and the Israel Defense Forces, as well as attacks on Israeli civilians by Palestinians. In addition, rockets were fired at Israel from Gaza and subsequent Israeli airstrikes were conducted. As I have stated numerous times, the indiscriminate firing of rockets against Israeli civilian targets by Hamas and other militant groups in Gaza is a violation of international law.

32. The demolitions and evictions that took place in Area C of the West Bank are of deep concern and were condemned by the international community. Palestinians require access to a fair planning and zoning regime if they are not to resort to the building of unauthorized structures that lead to unjustified demolitions. During the reporting period, 441 structures were demolished, causing the displacement of some 632 Palestinians, including 344 children. I reiterate my concern about the fate of 7,000 Palestinian Bedouins and herders in the occupied West Bank, who may be at risk of forcible transfer as Israel advances its plan to relocate these communities in three sites in Area C. This plan, which may be linked to settlement expansion in E1 and other areas, would seriously jeopardize the realization of the two-State solution. Similarly, I repeat my deep concern over the Israeli demolition orders for Susiya. I am also concerned about the risk of a forcible transfer of the Um al-Kheir Bedouin refugee community after the recent demolition of five dwellings next to an Israeli settlement near Hebron. Demolitions and forcible transfers contravene international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

33. Tensions also continued in occupied East Jerusalem, especially in the autumn months of 2014. Escalating tensions surrounding access to the holy sites contributed significantly to the spike in violence. The shooting of a campaigner for Jewish prayer rights on the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount on 29 October was followed by a series of attacks in East Jerusalem, including clashes at the Noble Sanctuary. Restrictions on access to holy sites in the Old City were imposed on the Palestinians, leading to multiple clashes between worshippers and the Israeli security forces. King Abdullah of Jordan and United States Secretary of State Kerry organized separate meetings with President Abbas and Prime Minister Netanyahu in

Amman on 13 November. Both sides announced firm commitments to maintain the status quo regarding the holy sites.

34. As of August 2015, 370 Palestinians were held by Israeli authorities in administrative detention, compared with 477 at the beginning of the reporting period. I reiterate my long-standing position that those detained must be charged and brought to trial or released without delay. The Government's decision on 14 June, which was subsequently approved by the Knesset, to permit force-feeding of prisoners on hunger strike under certain conditions is in contravention of international conventions.

35. Palestinians continued to advance their State-building programme. Despite a strong international consensus that the Palestinian Authority was capable of running a State, the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee was concerned about its economic viability during the reporting period. It maintained that concerted action was urgently required to stabilize the fiscal position of the Palestinian Authority, which faces a deficit of approximately $500 million for 2015, and to rekindle private sector-led economic growth. Efforts towards structural reform by the Palestinian Authority, including fiscal containment, and adequate and predictable assistance to the Government of Palestine by donors were considered essential to manage the deficit. The International Monetary Fund reported on 29 January that Palestinian economic activity had contracted in 2014 for the first time since 2006.

36. Israel has taken several steps to ease movement restrictions in the West Bank, including allowing entry into Israel without permit for Palestinian men over 55 and women over 50. Further measures were implemented during Ramadan, although they were later retracted owing to an escalation in violence. I also note positively that the number of Palestinians from the West Bank employed in Israel continued its rise of the past few years and is today at its highest since the beginning of the peace process in the early 1990s. I strongly encourage the Government of Israel to continue implementing measures that would facilitate sustainable growth and job creation for the Palestinian economy.

37. As noted in my last report, I remain seriously concerned about the lack of political progress and the high risk of an outbreak of violence between Israel and Palestinian militants. What is important now is for the international community to work together with the parties on the ground and in the region to create the conditions for a return to meaningful negotiations. In particular, I urge Israel to cease all settlement activity in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and to take further steps to ease the restrictions in place in the West Bank and Gaza. I also strongly encourage all Palestinians to pursue the path of non-violence and unity, in line with the PLO commitments, and call on them to make efforts to improve law and order, to combat extremism and incitement against Israel and to continue building strong and democratic institutions, which are essential to a viable, independent Palestinian State.

38. I would like to express my deep appreciation to the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Nickolay Mladenov, whom I appointed on 5 February, and his predecessor, Robert H. Serry, whom I thank for his outstanding performance during his seven-year tenure. I am also grateful to Pierre Krähenbühl for his able leadership as Commissioner-General of UNRWA. I pay tribute, too, to all United Nations staff who work in this area under difficult, at times dangerous, circumstances in the service of the United Nations. In May, Tony

Blair stepped down from his position as Quartet Representative for the Middle East. I reiterate my appreciation for his leadership over eight years.

39. As Secretary-General, I will continue to ensure that the United Nations works towards the establishment of an independent, democratic, contiguous and viable Palestinian State, living side by side in peace with a secure Israel, within the framework of a comprehensive regional settlement consistent with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003) and 1860 (2009), and in accordance with the road map, the Arab Peace Initiative and the principle of land for peace.